

Black Widow California's Only Poisonous Spider, Official Says

By K. H. SUTHERLAND, M.D., County Health Officer Pro Tem

The black widow spider (*Latroctes mactans*) is the only poisonous spider that inhabits this part of the United States, although in the Middle West and in the southern states the brown spider (*Loxosceles reclusa*) is also found. The brown spider has a bite just about as lethal as the widow's, but, thus far, it has not spread to California. Still, whether brown or black, poisonous spiders are little creatures that practically nobody wants around.

Bites of the black widow need not be reported to health authorities, so there is no record of how many such bites occur in Los Angeles County. Nationally, it has been estimated that about 1500 persons a year are bitten by black widow spiders, yet it is admittedly difficult to make reliable estimates as so many cases never come to medical attention and are not generally reported even when they do.

ONE INDEX of the severity of the bite, however, is the number of annual hospital admissions of severe cases of arachnidism (spider poisoning) that occur. During the past decade, about 40 cases of black widow spider poisoning per year have been reported by local hospitals.

Out of this yearly number, from 10 to 15 were ill enough to be confined to the hospital for further treatment following administration of first aid. Since 1956, however, no fatalities following the widow's bite have been reported in Los Angeles County.

THE BLACK WIDOW is a glossy black spider with a round shoe-buttonlike abdomen that is usually, but not always, marked with a red hourglass-like shape. Its normal position is to hang upside down in its rough, tough, and untidy web so that the hourglass may be plainly visible when she is below eye level. Her over-all length, including silvery legs,

is from about one to one-and-a-quarter inches.

The widow likes solitude and shows a preference for secluded places such as a garage or outbuilding, a clothes closet, or under a house. She has been found in hedges and woodpiles, in fence corners and under debris, and in any number of other places that offer seclusion and darkness and warmth.

THE VENOM of the black widow is very potent, even more so than that of the rattlesnake. However, she has a great deal less of it to inject, and so the bite is not considered as grave an emergency as snakebite. In those rare instances where the victim is

weakened by some other illness or is allergic to the toxin, the effects of the bite may indeed be serious.

First-aid treatment consists of keeping the victim warm and quiet and the application of a good antiseptic to the injured area. Cold compresses or ice placed on the site of the wound may ease the pain and retard the absorption of the poison. If muscular spasms occur before the services of a doctor can be obtained, warm compresses or immersion in warm water may be helpful.

A FEW YEARS ago a vaccine was developed (a horse serum product) which is a specific treatment for black widow poisoning. However, some people cannot tolerate horse serum products and in such cases the cure may be much worse than the effects of the bite.

Eradication of black widows is recommended whenever they are found around the premises. A clean-up of the clutter often found in the yard or within buildings will help to rid area of likely black widow homesites. Furthermore, there are many excellent insecticides on the market that are effective in controlling these dangerous pests, and directions for use are always given on the container.

PREVENTION of the widow's bite is obviously preferable to treatment. But should a person be bitten, it is always advisable to obtain medical attention as quickly as possible.

Pastor Kuester Speaks Sunday

Pastor H. Earl Kuester will preach at all services of the Calvary Baptist Church, 2818 Manhattan Beach Blvd., next Sunday. At the 8:30 and 11 a.m. duplicate services, the sermon will be on "Seven Steps to a Life of Power." In the message, the pastor will deal with the problem of bridging the gap between what an individual knows he ought to be and what he knows he is in fact. He will speak of the Biblical sources of motivation

and power to become what he knows he ought to be.

At the 7 p.m. Vesper Service the message will be entitled, "Pastors, Laymen, and the Lord's Work." At this service the message will delineate the Biblical function of pastors and laymen in the Lord's work.

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